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ABSTRACT

Social studies education in the United States has been viewed by many as a forum in which to socialize new citizens, to ensure that people of differing backgrounds have a history and ideals that they can share. Social studies also is perceived by some as a vehicle through which students can learn the value of conflict and difference, in the learning process and in situations outside of the classroom. This paper examines the existing role of conflict in the social studies classroom, and argues that conflict holds an untapped potential. A research study in which four high school social studies teachers were interviewed and observed in their classrooms is described and discussed. The role of conflict in the social studies classroom was examined in terms of what materials were covered (for example, multiple perspectives on historical events), and how those materials were covered (for example, opportunities for criticism and debate). Detailed descriptions and analyses of the methods of each of the four teachers and the role conflict played in their classrooms are presented. How each teacher handled the issue of human rights is focused upon specifically. It was concluded that each teacher differed considerably as to the extent to which they allowed conflict to play a role in their teaching and in their classroom. A 65-item list of references is included. (DB)

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THE SOCIAL STUDIES

KNOWLEDGE FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL CONFLICT?

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Stanford University
AERA April, 1991

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THE SOCIAL STUDIES: KNOWLEDGE FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL CONFLICT?

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Stanford University
AERA April, 1991
DRAFT

Imagine a typical day in the life of a high school social studies class. From a distance, the image is familiar around the world. Students sit in orderly formation, facing a central point or the "front" of the room. The teacher, as main source and interpreter of knowledge (besides the textbook she assigns), stands in a pivotal position. Probably the teacher, Ms. So-and-So, is talking now, as usual. Some students speak short syllables to fill in the spaces provided by the teacher. Ms. So-and-So indicates whether they have done so correctly, rewards and punishes accordingly. Other students never utter a word of "social studies" subject matter aloud here: they have learned to avoid sanctions by keeping quiet. This paper takes a closer look at the apparently-ordinary picture of U.S. social studies education, through the magnifying lens of social conflict.

In the classroom situation we have just conjured up, teachers and texts have the primary role as sources of social studies knowledge. Students *can* produce or contest knowledge in such a classroom, but it's exceptional rather than essential. Implicitly, each student is fundamentally the same -- same desk, same schedule, same lessons, same subordinate status relative to the "stuff" of the

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curriculum. Uncontrolled interaction that might uncover differences is discouraged. In sum, the structure of the social studies class appears designed to avoid conflict.

Social studies is the school subject associated with preparing young people for political citizenship. Citizens in a plural democracy inevitably encounter conflict, in part through the ebbs and flows of social movements. In Dewey's words, underlying any social conflict is an intellectual conflict, or controversy. Social studies education is an arena for consideration of such ideological questions.

> All social movements involve conflicts which are reflected intellectually in controversies. It would not be a sign of health if such an important social interest as education were not also an arena of struggles, practical and theoretical. ... [This requires] the introduction of a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice. It is for this reason that it is so difficult to develop a philosophy of education, the moment tradition and custom are departed from.
>
> -- John Dewey, Experience and Education, 1938 (p.5).

Here is a paradox. On the one hand, education is to a considerable degree controlled by political and economic elites. A nation-state is interested in promoting political stability, built on consensus. Even democratic governments do not fund schools in order to support social movements, but rather to socialize for general regime support. *Back to basics* and *cultural literacy* are prominent themes on the 1990's educational reform agenda in this country: these ideas invoke common ground rather than conflict.

On the other hand, disagreement in our society is inevitable, the stuff of life, the fuel for learning and progress. *Multicultural education* and *critical thinking* are also themes on the educational agenda. Multicultural education and critical thinking goals invoke the potential value of conflict for learning and progress; people can learn to handle cultural and ideological conflict by practicing with it in school. Given these competing demands, how does conflict fit into the knowledge base of high school social studies?

Conflict in the curriculum

"Conflict" refers to controversy, opposition, and contradiction -- to disagreements that matter, subjectively, to the people involved. Difference alone does not imply conflict. Conflict may enter the social studies curriculum in *what* material is covered (curricular content, for example multiple perspectives on historical events) and/or in *how* material is covered (pedagogical strategies, for example criticism and debate).

But conflict is dangerous. It provokes risks in terms of authority, planning/predictability, and emotional climate. Thus it is not surprising that "difference" is sometimes added to curriculum in such a way as to *not* provoke conflict. For example, history lessons can include more social groups or more parts of the world, yet still emphasize commonalities rather than disagreements. Multicultural or "critical thinking" lessons are often implemented in ways that emphasize commonalities over disagreements, formulas over real criticism. Different ideas may be taught but not evaluated, not brought to bear on one another as alternative perspectives. Students may move in lock-step, without being engaged as diverse individuals in meaningful discourse.

The human diversity emerging in U.S. classrooms during the current period of immigration, for example, is not inherently conflictual, but it holds the potential for conflict. Difference among students, instead of being approached as a potential source of knowledge and inspiration, is often given as a rationale for building *consensus* through social studies:

> . . . [M]igrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America have filled our classrooms with students whose ethnic and cultural background is not 'Western.' *They need a past they can share* with Americans of European descent; and equally, Americans of European descent *need a past they can share* with all their fellow citizens, including the indigenous Indian population that got here before anyone else. World history fits these needs, and only world history can hope to do so. -- (p.53) from National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century, 1989 (*italics added*).

Other points of view recall Dewey's reminder that education is an arena for struggles. Radical critics of the social studies curriculum point out the value-laden nature of what is taken for knowledge (e.g. Anyon 1979, Apple 1979, Freire 1970, Giroux 1988, McNeil 1986). When knowledge about human events is taken as neutral and indisputable, and the teacher and textbook are taken as "the" authorities on that knowledge, then conflict is essentially expunged from the curriculum. Radical or critical pedagogy provides a compelling alternative to this "neutral" knowledge and the associated reproduction of systemic inequalities. It calls for curriculum based on reflection, dialogue, and attention to competing interests in society -- in other words, for constructive use of conflict.

Underlying criticism of consensus-based social studies are psychological principles such as those of Festinger (1964). "Cognitive dissonance" is Festinger's explanation for the way contradictory information can stimulate a learner to revise her understanding of a concept. Conflict is educational because it stimulates reflection and problem-solving. This view of conflict is not unknown:

> History without controversy is not good history, nor is such history as interesting to students as an account that captures the debates of the times. Students should understand that the events in history provoked controversy as do the events reported in today's headlines. . . . Students should also recognize that historians often disagree about the interpretation of historical events and that today's textbooks may be altered by future research. Through the study of controversial issues, both in history and in current affairs, students should learn that people in a democratic society have the right to disagree, that different perspectives have to be taken into account, and that judgements should be based on reasonable evidence and not on bias and emotion.
>
> -- from State of California History-Social Science Framework, 1987

The problem with many of these critiques is that they have not taken into account the tensions faced by classroom teachers, not to mention students, in dealing with conflict in the classroom (McKee 1988, McNeil 1981, Newmann 1985). From the teacher's and the student's points of view, critical perspectives are complicated and unpredictable. Compared to traditional texts and lectures, material that includes opposing perspectives is inherently more work: there

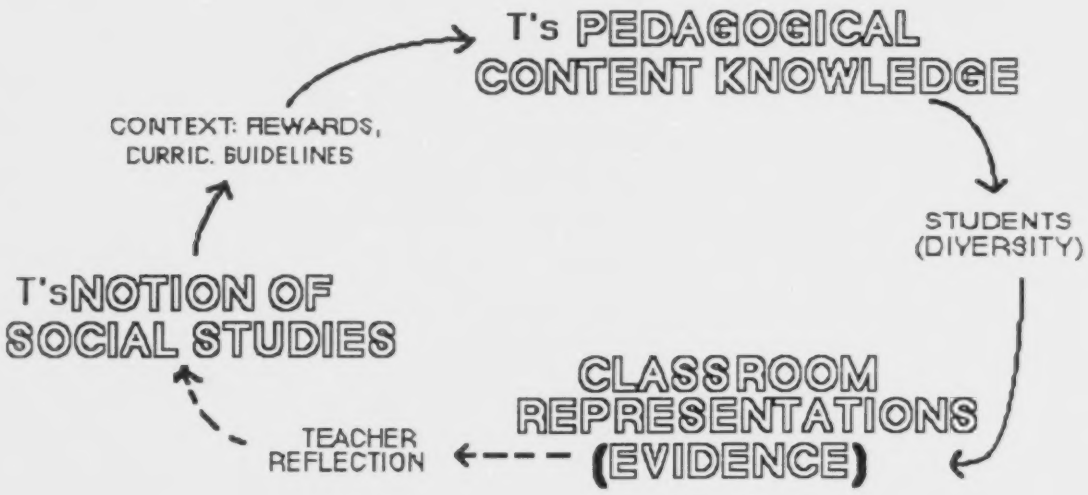
is more material to deal with, and it is more difficult to understand, thus more time-consuming to manage. Those who propose reform need to know more about what is possible and reasonable for ordinary teachers, and about the solutions these teachers have already invented to manage the recurring educational dilemma of conflict.

Social studies knowledge

"Pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman 1987) is the set of abilities a teacher employs to translate her subject-matter knowledge into forms that her various students will understand. A social studies curriculum built around the notion of "struggles, practical and theoretical" would call upon different translations and skills than a curriculum built around consensual "basic facts." This project is built on the assumption that these different approaches to social studies will boil down to observable differences in classroom pedagogy.

Figure A illustrates the relation of the implemented social studies curriculum to the above discussion of the goals and strategies of social studies education. A teacher's conception about *which* social studies knowledge is important (constrained by contextual factors such as the school's official curriculum) guides her development of pedagogical content knowledge. From that pool of knowledge (depending on the needs and abilities of the students in the class), the teacher draws the specific problems, texts, and activities she uses in her lessons. The resulting representations of social studies concepts can be observed in classrooms (this classroom behavior is the primary "evidence" in this research). In some situations, teachers' reflection on what happens in their classrooms can lead to changed notions about social studies knowledge.

Figure A:
Formulation of Social Studies ideas into implemented curriculum



Social studies, like any school subject, has a dynamic knowledge base of information, powerful ideas, and ways of thinking. The business of education is to give students access to the structure or essence of that knowledge (Bruner 1962). This brings up an educational dilemma (Berlak & Berlak 1981): on the one hand, knowledge may be seen as *content*, basically *given and unchanging*. This view minimizes conflict. Teachers and students are often rewarded, in the current system, for this simplification. On the other hand, knowledge may be seen as *process*, basically *problematic and transitory*. In this view, conflict is inevitable. The critical view of knowledge is more complicated and riskier for students and teachers, but it lends itself well to a changing society in which democratic participation can be broadened and social inequities are challenged.

The knowledge dilemma is especially poignant in working-class schools: there, lack of prior knowledge can block students' chances to gain new knowledge, and thus advance, in an often-hostile system. Anyon (1981), Wilcox (1982), and Berlak & Berlak (1981) showed that textbooks and classroom discourse de-emphasized controversy in some working-class elementary schools, presenting knowledge as

neutral and un-contestable. When asked, teachers suggested that this simplification was necessary in order to avoid academic failure and authority problems. In contrast, the affluent professional-class schools they observed emphasized independent thought, including relatively frequent consideration of controversial material. Does practice with conflict in the social studies curriculum give affluent students more skill (power) to be leaders, to promote their own interests in the democratic marketplace?

For even the most verbally-skilled and confident students, curriculum based on controversy and criticism is risky.

> Working hard with a teacher, or any mentor, is masochistic. It is especially so for adolescents, whose vulnerability and inexperience are [extreme]. Getting agreement with them to pursue this often lacerating process of exposing that inexperience, and the errors it reaps, is a subtle, delicate business. -- Ted Sizer, *Horace's Compromise*, p.159.

If conflict in the curriculum can create risks and resistance from students in general (see also McNeil 1986), then how difficult might it be for students whose prior education, command of standard English, or social status in the classroom is also low? Paradoxically, conflict in the social studies class, even with the best of intentions, can be riskiest for those already "at risk" in school (Metz 1978). Conflictual discussions, for example, are ambiguous, unpredictable, and public for the student compared to traditional pedagogies. Conflict calls on learners to mobilize resources of prior knowledge, rather than just adding coins to the mental piggy-bank (Freire 1970). Conflictual material could have contradictory effects on those whose prior knowledge is relatively limited.

Reports of classroom outcomes that use a statistical mean may be missing something important. There is no reason to assume that conflictual curriculum affects all students in a classroom the same way. Social studies is designed to prepare people for democratic citizenship: those least likely to get the prerequisites for citizenship elsewhere deserve particular attention in school research. There are reasons to hope conflictual curriculum benefits all, but there are also reasons to be skeptical and to look closely inside classrooms. Social

studies teachers, especially in places such as urban California with massive immigrant populations, manage this knowledge dilemma daily in heterogeneous classes. The strategies they have developed --their wisdom of practice-- can shed light on the problem of developing knowledge for participation in social conflict.

Research method

The research involves case studies of four experienced social studies teachers in northern California. Data were collected during the entire academic year 1989-90. Ruth, Sarah, Tom, and Ken[1] work in two public high school districts serving heterogeneous student populations. West H.S. and East H.S. (Sarah and Ruth) are in the same "union" (combined municipality) district; students choose which high school to attend. North H.S. (Tom and Ken) is in another district serving a comparable ethnic and economic population.

Figure B: Composition of Student Populations[2]

	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS		
Ethnic Group	North H.S.	West H.S.	East H.S.
Amer. Indian	0.1	0.2	0.3
Asian	8.7	5.1	4.2
Filipino	10.2	0.9	1.6
Pacific Islander	5.5	1.7	3.0
Black	5.2	10.0	3.3
White	37.3	54.2	49.4
Hispanic	33.0	27.8	38.5
TOTAL No. of Students	1286	1404	1606

[1] All proper names in the data are pseudonyms.

[2] Statistics are from 1989 school documents, with categories determined by school officials. "White" and "Black" do not include those of Hispanic ancestry; "Asian" and "Hispanic" include both established citizens and a variety of recent immigrants.

After initial observations and interviews with several teachers in each district, these particular teachers were chosen as subjects for the study because they seemed to have contrasting approaches to using conflict as a learning opportunity (see Figure C). All four teachers have taught for more than fifteen years, including at least six years in the schools where they were observed. Because conflictual pedagogy had previously been associated with authority (discipline) risks (Metz 1978, McNeil 1986, Swidler 1979), the sample was chosen to avoid the additional authority risks associated with inexperienced teachers.

I observed the same two class periods for each teacher, an average of twice per week per class over several months, in order to get familiar with the names and behaviors of specific students. My intention was to get a detailed picture of the implemented curriculum, including who participated in the educational processes the teachers constructed. I wanted to study the *interface* between the teachers' curricula and the various individuals in their classrooms, rather than assuming the curriculum was a uniform "input" to the class as a whole.

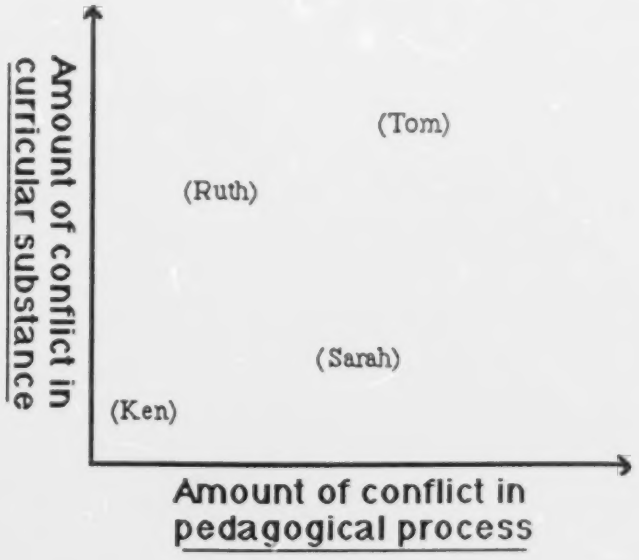
My participant-observer role in the classrooms was roughly comparable to that of an unusually attentive student. I sat among the students near the back of the room, watching, listening, and taking notes. For each observation, I gathered limited-inference data about topics covered and general instructions to students. After the first month I learned to also record how many students spoke publicly during lessons, including their names to help me notice unusual participation and unusual silences.

I kept long-hand notes about what conflicts (if any) came up during each observation, what attitudes were expressed by whom, and how class members seemed to engage in the material set before them. In order not to pre-judge the educational relevance of particular conflicts, I tried to record everything from mild procedural disagreements to substantive criticism to analysis of opposing perspectives. Because my general expectation proved correct -- classroom conflict is very often avoided -- this recording task was not as difficult as it might appear.

As a way to tie the educational use of conflict to specific evidence and implications, I studied the various ways each teacher represented key social studies concepts to their students. The idea of human "rights," for example, is handled in both world studies and U.S. history at the high school level. The "rights" concept holds the potential for using conflict in various ways as a learning opportunity: in this paper I use this concept as an example for showing specific contrasts among the four teachers.

Observations were supplemented by at least three informal interviews with each teacher. In December, I gave each teacher a copy of my first tentative analysis of conflict's role in her/his own teaching, asked for criticism, and subsequently discussed the matter with them. The combined result of these data collection strategies is a detailed picture of the four implemented curricula and a general flavor of each teacher's reflections about it.

Figure C:
Dimensions of Contrast Among Teacher Subjects



The teachers

Ruth and Sarah teach ninth grade World Studies in the same semi-urban school district, using the same official curriculum in different but comparable schools. I observed them in their classrooms for one semester (Ruth) and one and a half semesters (Sarah). Tom and Ken teach eleventh grade U.S. History, using the same textbook and official curriculum, in an urban school comparable to Ruth's and Sarah's. I observed both Tom and Ken for the entire school year. All schools are in the San Francisco Bay area. The two districts have similar social studies requirements for graduation, based on California state law. Ruth, Sarah, Tom and Ken made contrasting pedagogical decisions about conflict, based on their (implicit and explicit) ways of understanding the social studies curriculum.

Ruth teaches ninth grade world studies at East H.S. She is a mentor teacher and an enthusiastic participant in area global education activities. Her booming voice can be heard the minute one rounds the corner onto her hallway. Ruth teaches from front and center, smiling energetically and keeping her rows of students under strict control. Ruth's exceptional interest in teaching for critical thinking made her an attractive subject for this study but also made her unavailable during the second semester, when she would be on a sabbatical to develop critical thinking curriculum.

Ruth's focus is on cognitive understanding of potentially-conflictual subject matter. Differences and conflicts between countries, cultures, ideologies, and ethnic or economic groups are central to her curriculum. In general, she teaches analysis, not criticism. For example, during the unit on Latin America, students read short biographies of a Sandinista soldier and a Contra fighter -- they answered homework questions interpreting each point of view, but they did not discuss or take positions themselves in class (homework 11/27). Students are expected to demonstrate mastery of information and application of concepts within a teacher-controlled framework. Ruth sets a firm agenda and parameters in this classroom. Open disagreement, even between student peers, is rare.

Ruth feels that a substantial command of facts is a prerequisite to useful engagement in opinion or criticism. Social studies knowledge, for Ruth, is more "content" than "process:" the focus is on mastering historical and geographic names, dates,concepts, and definitions. Conflicts are approached mainly as cognitive problems to be understood -- analyzed (separating a whole into parts for study), rather than criticized (evaluating, finding fault). Ruth says that engagement with ideas is something an educated person can do all their life, provided they are prepared with a proper informational foundation. If the classroom does not provide that minimum, then higher-order thinking is irrelevant and impossible. Like Jerome Bruner (1962, p.121), Ruth believes that "the unity of knowledge is to be found within the knowledge itself, if the knowledge is worth mastering." Thus the personal experience and opinions of students may be important but they are not central to Ruth's social studies curriculum.

> I think discussion requires a depth of knowledge on the students' part... I'm torn between having a discussion and giving them enough knowledge... I think kids feel very frustrated in discussion groups, unless I structure it: find this, now find this. [Why?] Because they don't know what they're talking about. I'm torn: should I be teaching the content, the history, or should I be letting them deal with feelings? I need to do the content *first*, so I don't get much time for the second. (**Ruth**, 1/5/90 -- grade 9 world studies).

Ruth taught the concept of "rights" in November. First, she introduced systematically the concepts/fields of culture, economics, and political science and the geographic area of Latin America. Then (11/9), she gave her class a definition of "human right," explaining and drilling until students seemed to understand. She gave students a list of rights drawn from the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and asked students to categorize them. After this material was apparently mastered, Ruth invited students to begin responding to the ideas a little bit by drawing their own pictures depicting a human right of their choice. Ruth introduced the concepts of "democracy" and "dictatorship" in a similar manner: students (individually and collectively) deduced characteristics of

each from reading assignments based in the Latin American context and were drilled for clarification and assessment.

Near the end of the human rights, democracy/dictatorship, and Latin America unit, students were given two points of view to read about a specific case regarding the war in Nicaragua (11/27). As far as I know, they were never invited (nor given time) to express their own views on this topic during class. The culmination of the unit (in addition to a multiple choice test on Latin American geography, economics, and politics), was an activity in which students did take active perspectives on a human rights issue (11/30). Students were given specific roles to learn and perform in a simulation of a U.S. Supreme Court case on freedom of speech in a high school newspaper. In this case, students were told to take particular roles and perspectives -- they were not invited to give their own opinions. Similarly, at end of the next unit (on the Middle East) students were given two perspectives to read and learn about the Arab-Israeli conflict (1/9,1/10). This time, in addition to an "objective" test, students were invited to voice their own opinions within the structure of a classroom debate on that issue.

Rights, according to Ruth, were both abstract concepts to be understood ("something that belongs to you, just for being human ... natural rights" - 11/9) and concrete problems to be analyzed. She presented her students with the message that rights are complicated and often controversial, and that one should know a considerable body of facts and analysis before taking any value position on a rights issue.

Sarah teaches ninth grade world studies at West H.S. Her students are arranged in a double semi-circle around a big orange rug. Classes begin with a ritual "Hello, everyone!" and a welcome of every newcomer. Sarah frequently moves around the circle, speaking privately with each student, monitoring work and answering questions. The room is filled with a hubbub of voices, including mutual assistance on learning tasks as well as whole-class discussions.

Sarah's lessons focus on experiencing and responding to differences, especially differences of culture or values. Geography lessons, for example, often began with student or teacher telling a story about someplace they had lived or visited. When nobody in the room has experienced a region or culture directly, Sarah brings in films or pictures. Every topic seems to stimulate discussion. Student voices are heard more than the teacher's, and disagreement is common between student and teacher as well as student and student. When students respond either to one another's opinions or to foreign cultural phenomena with put-downs, Sarah affirms the value of multiple viewpoints and enforces norms of respectful behavior by specifically complimenting people for asking questions and raising constructive criticisms (for example 10/27,2/8,2/22).

Sarah's teaching is reminiscent of John Dewey's emphasis on basing education in personal experience. "Intelligence does not generate action except as it is enkindled by feeling," he writes (1935/1963, p.51). The cognitive material Sarah presents to her class is not particularly conflictual, but students practice handling conflict every week because of her pedagogical emphasis on affective engagement and free-flowing discussion. Officially, Sarah teaches the same curriculum as Ruth. Her classroom operates differently, in part because her view of knowledge differs. For Sarah, knowledge is a "process," open to conflict and continual change.

> The *process* of how you go about learning information is what's important. I don't think historical information is as important as understanding general concepts and ideas that make life work... I want them, really, to become compassionate, loving individuals. (**Sarah**, 12/12/89 -- grade 9 world studies)

Sarah taught about "rights" by focusing on values for individual behavior, especially within her own classroom. For example, after the Dalai Lama of Tibet was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, Sarah brought in news articles, maps, video newscasts, and editorials about this man and what he stood for. Then, in class, Sarah encouraged her students to give their views about the ideas raised by this material. She affirmed each person's right to their own opinion. At the same

time (10/11) it was the last week before the World Series: when a student pretended to spit on a classmate's "A's" baseball cap, Sarah integrated this into her lesson:

> "We have, in the Bay Area right now, a rivalry existing between two baseball teams, the Oakland A's and the San Francisco Giants. It's no different from any other rivalry between two countries, or two religions, or two groups of people, or anything else. In this class, I want you to respect the right of each person to choose their favorite team, and to wear the symbols of that team without being hurt or put down or bothered in any way. Is that clear?"

Sarah's next unit was on journalism. The news media at that moment provided plenty of "rights" cases that shaped the curriculum to follow. Sarah brought in television news footage on the governor's race in Virginia that focused on the conflict over abortion rights (11/1). The following week, concurrent with a pre-planned video on the U.N. "Rights of the Child", the class discussed the mass exodus from East Germany (11/8). The "Political Systems of the World" unit was built around the cases of Ceaucescu in Romania (1/3), Neo-Nazism in Germany (1/5), and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the U.S. (1/12). The world geography unit was suspended briefly for a discussion on Nelson Mandela and apartheid in South Africa (2/13). Sarah brought in material from the news and supplemented it with unit charts and worksheets. Discussions were generally initiated and shaped by student comments on that material. Sarah did more facilitating than information-giving, although she did both.

Beginning the unit on Japan, Sarah had students identify and list their feelings of discomfort or rejection about unfamiliar practices, then taught a "culture chant:" [Somebody says "that's weird," etc. The class adds] "...but I was raised in a different culture and learned to like different things" (2/22). Sarah brought in curricular material on rights, but not in a concentrated manner: no unit was directly organized around this concept. Instead, rights were a theme that Sarah wove in throughout her course. She taught about rights more by example than didactically. This is the way she explained it to her students (2/8): "In this class, I try to give you more freedoms than you might get in some other classes, because I know that this class is where you practice taking responsibility." For

Sarah, rights were taught through responsibilities and freedoms in classroom behavior, not on laws or abstractions.

Tom teaches eleventh grade U.S. history at North H.S. The period begins with desks in rows and Tom's quiet voice giving the educational objectives for the day. As often as not, desks are pulled into cooperative groups or arranged in a circle for class discussion for part of the period. Tom is as frequently at a side table, managing or observing independent work from behind the scenes, as at the lectern or chalkboard. "The fun thing is to get them to inter-react on important issues," he says. "I want them to learn to think" (10/31 interview).

Tom expects his students to identify, analyze and discuss opposing viewpoints in every social studies unit. Students are asked to state and defend their own opinions, very often by linking controversial current events to concepts in the history text. For example, Tom pursues parallels between the American Revolution and 1989 events in El Salvador, and then in the next breath draws an analogy of both of these situations to the "rivalry" between North H.S. and the neighboring school over football (10/12, per.5). course-work includes tasks such as, "State the argument presented by the Federalist... State the position of the anti-federalist" (homework 10/31), or "How did the Constitution solve the conflict over slavery? (exam 10/25). For Tom, history contains ideas that are useful lessons for participation in conflictual democratic decision-making in the present and future.

Unlike the other teachers in this study, Tom's behavior corresponds to the views of Festinger (1964) and Bruner (1962) that confusion can be productive. Like Sarah, Tom sees knowledge mostly in terms of process, although not to the exclusion of an enduring body of information. He presents more questions than answers. At the core of Tom's curriculum are central tensions over which people have had (and will have) conflict.

> What I tell [students], over and over, is: they shouldn't walk out of class saying 'why do I have to take social studies'... This is *not irrelevant*, what we're doing here! Like when you learn about Article 2

> Section 2 in the Constitution, George Washington reserving the right for the President to be Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces: *that comes up again*, with Nixon in the Vietnam War, in the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. All of these issues connect the past to the present to the future... Social studies and history give you the broad awareness and understanding that you *need* to read the news, to be a part of this society. (**Tom**, 2/5/90 -- grade 11 U.S. history)

Tom's approach to teaching about "rights" is to insist that his students interact with rights as both ideals and unsolved problems. Several times during the school year, he asked students to interpret, choose, and apply the concept of rights to specific cases.

The first time I saw Tom cover the idea was in the October unit on the (construction of the) U.S. Constitution. On 10/17, for example, the small-group assignment was to "examine the following scenarios testing the basic liberties of the Constitution and state your (group) opinion as how the situation is addressed by the U.S. Constitution." The three scenarios include permitting a parade by neo-Nazis through a Jewish neighborhood, polygamy as a potential religious freedom, and searching a rebellious student's locker without her permission. Tom says to the class, "I want you to interact with each other, to discuss it ... to state your opinions ... Don't write anything down until you discuss it" (per.3). "The only wrong answer is not doing it ... Look for, 'what is the Constitutional question being brought up here?" (per.5). Tom was one of two teachers in my study who volunteered to "field test" a thematic unit about human rights in November. (The other was Ruth, who chose different lessons from the same unit materials.) Again, Tom's focus was on pushing students to make choices and assign priorities among rights, stressing the complex give-and-take when any right is applied in "real life."

Throughout the year, Tom brought in contrasting perspectives on a variety of rights issues as they came up in either the text or the newspapers. For example, the potential "right to die" (11/29), gay clergy and the turmoil in South Africa (2/1), students' potential right to wear gang-related clothing (2/9), and so on through the year. In the Civil War unit, Tom emphasized the disagreements of the time over concepts such as "popular sovereignty" and "slavery." He asked the students whether these were at issue in the world today, and

told David he was "very insightful" when David asserted that nearby farm laborers are like slaves. Students applied popular sovereignty to current conflicts in the Philippines, Yugoslavia, and East Germany (12/11). The unit on 19th-century immigration to the U.S. included interpretation of a political cartoon depicting opposing views on the rights of immigrants at the time (2/26). Two months later (4/23-24) Tom had students take positions orally and in writing on the rights of immigrants in the U.S. today (to assimilate or not, speak languages other than English, etc).

For Tom, "rights" appear to be fluid ideals which evoke and are evidence of social conflicts.

Ken teaches eleventh grade U.S. history at North H.S. His classroom is never silent, yet it is one of the quietest I've ever been in. At least three days out of every week, students pick up the day's map or worksheet from the usual place, sit down at their usual seats in rows, and work independently. Usually there is a small crowd wherever Ken sits marking papers, waiting to have work checked or chatting affably with the teacher. Ken stresses the basic skills of reading text and maps for informational detail. Students spend the bulk of their time copying names, dates, and other details from book to worksheet and from notebook to "objective" test.

More than anything else, Ken strives to make his students comfortable, rather than challenged. Expectations are minimal and utterly clear, and the apparent result is general popularity and a calm industrious hum in the classroom. Even though textbook history is, in Ken's words, "past... dead... just dates and facts" (5/21 interview), it is the backbone of his curriculum. This is the identical textbook that Tom tells his students is "not irrelevant..." Clearly for Ken, more than any other teacher in this study, social studies knowledge is a static set of "content," divorced from any of the processes or conflicts that gave shape to human events. Despite the same text and official curriculum, Ken's lessons teach markedly different social studies from Tom's.

Ken believes that conflictual material should usually be avoided, because "they'd have no idea what to do. They'd be so

confused, it'd be chaotic" (11/2 interview). Every week includes at least one day of films and/or guest speakers, and these events do sometimes bring in controversial material. However, these controversies are kept strictly limited by their separation from the "real" content of the textbook and exams and by the ritual way they are handled (students fill out a standard response form for every film and every guest speaker). Ken has what Linda McNeil (1986) calls "defensive teaching" down to a fine art: the knowledge he offers is fragmented, simplified, and so carefully neutralized as to provide no opening for resistance.

> You can only do so much about the past; that's why I have these speakers about current events... The [text]book says absolutely nothing --*nada* -- about citizenship... The only thing that teaches citizenship is the films, the speakers, and my worksheets. It *may be* in the book, but it's too subtle, the kids don't get it... It's dead in the history book, because it's just dates and facts... (**Ken**, 5/21/90 -- grade 11 U.S. history)

The U.S. Bill of Rights was the only history topic I heard Ken lecture on to his students: his usual style involved individual seat-work using worksheets and textbook, interspersed with movies and guest speakers. He told me (and the students) that he didn't think the textbook did a good enough job on this topic. The "rights" lectures took most of three class days (#1-3 on 12/11,#3-8 on 12/13, and #9-10 on 1/22), after the chapter on "westward expansion" and before (or during) the chapter on the Civil War. In each case, Ken presented the law as he saw it, giving relevant examples and responding to brief clarifying or applying questions by students ("can you...","what if..."). He asked only very few convergent questions -- any opinions expressed by students were unsolicited and not followed up. Civil rights also came up in the chapter on the "turbulent decade" of the 1960's, but in this case rights issues were simply some of the vocabulary with which students were expected to fill in the blanks of their worksheets. "Rights," in Ken's teaching, appear as laws that "we have" in the U.S. -- the image is of rules that everyone should follow and be grateful for.

Observations and interviews about Ken's course unearthed two exceptions to this conflict-free approach to rights. First, during the

last Bill of Rights lecture and two or three additional times during the year, Ken assigned lessons on the death penalty. He brought in a speaker (11/17) and at least one article (12/13) asserting that the death penalty violates a person's right to avoid cruel and unusual punishment. He asked students to write and support their point of view on the issue twice during the year, and offered the matter as an issue for classroom debate twice (11/21, 3/28). There were a few special days set aside from the normal (text-oriented) curriculum in which students were asked to read controversial material and engage in discussion about it. The other occasions for "rights" issues to be raised as controversies were provided by a few of the frequent guest speakers. While many speakers did not address rights or any other potential controversy, speakers such as the county Criminal Justice Council representative (10/25) did bring up such matters for classroom discussion. Ken generally observed both student discussions and guest-speaker sessions without participating, which may or may not have given students an image of such perspective-taking as unimportant or "not real social studies work."

Discussion

Underlying a social studies teacher's approach to conflict is a notion of social studies built on an image of society. Specifically, teachers have contrasting views of conflict's place in human history and, consequently, in the knowledge that should be expected of future citizens. Different views of the subject matter lead to different curricular and pedagogical choices. For example, if history is seen to involve an array of issues that "connect the past to the present to the future" (Tom, 2/5) then conflict (ever unavoidable in current events) takes on a central pedagogical role in the classroom. If, on the other hand, history is "dead... just dates and facts" (Ken, 5/21) then conflict is nearly eliminated from the teaching process. A teacher may avoid conflict until students have acquired substantial "content" knowledge (Ruth, 1/9), or she may use conflict to engage students in learning the principles and behaviors of social studies knowledge (Sarah, 12/12).

These short portraits do not do justice to their subjects, in part because no mortal teacher is perfectly consistent. Every teacher plays out conflicts and contradictions constantly in her/his work. These contradictions can never be entirely divorced from the social context of school teaching:

> When we say that persons' behaviors are manifestations of conflicting dispositions or attitudes it is as mistaken to take this to mean that they are the outcome of a deliberated choice between conflicting states of mind, as it is to say the behaviors are determined, with or without their awareness, by external economic and social forces or by 'pragmatic' considerations. . . . The dialectic is 'within' persons who are simultaneously pawns and originators of action, and between persons and an outside world that at every moment is in them and upon them. -- Ann & Harold Berlak Dilemmas of Schooling, 1981 (p.130-131).

Each of these four experienced teachers has worked out unique ways to handle the contradictions of social studies education in a plural and unequal society. They have reasons for their behavior that can be traced to the constraints and rewards of school and society as well as to personal beliefs and skills. The interview aspect of this research was neither complete enough nor well-enough designed to reliably uncover psychological, educational, or ideological explanations for these teachers' behavior. However, the observations do imply that there is a great range of difference among classrooms we call social studies. Other aspects of this study will show an equally-broad range of difference in the ways these teachers' students are able to participate in learning social studies.

It is interesting how different, within the same general social and school contexts, these teachers' classrooms can be. Clearly the *official* constraints are not the only powerful factors: even when the official texts and curricula are supposedly the same, the contrasts are striking. Ruth and Tom, teaching officially-different courses, used international and conflictual material in a more similar way than Ruth did with Sarah (in 9th grade world studies in the East-West district) or Tom did with Ken (in 11th grade U.S. history at North).

By representing "rights" in a particular way, these four teachers were teaching, modeling, and having their students practice different kinds of "citizenship." The differences among those

representations cannot be viewed along only one continuum (informed vs. uninformed): that dimension is cross-cut with another continuum, which might run from from participatory to passive. Students may practice engaging in constructive management of social conflict, for example applying and weighing human rights ideals, within the "laboratory" of the classroom. Alternatively, students may practice doing as they are told, viewing rights as rules made by and for somebody else.

From Ruth and Ken, in contrasting ways, I learned to see the importance of prior knowledge for students' participation in social conflict as citizens. Ruth had high expectations for her students: she wanted them to learn, analyze, and understand so that their eventual criticisms would be reasoned and convincing. Ken focused on skills and information so "basic" that substantive and procedural conflict was nearly invisible. He presented the same unthreatening minimum to every student, leaving no room for critical thought but also leaving nobody behind. Sarah and Tom used more Deweyan approaches, showing that it is possible in a standard public school to develop knowledge through conflictual experience instead of relegating participation to some time after information-gathering

The study raises several questions for future research. It will be important to study a larger sample of teachers, to get a better view of the range and frequency of variations. More and better-structured interviews will help to uncover the sources and reasons for teachers' various approaches to teaching conflict in social studies. Large-scale studies, once the operative variables are clearer, could tease out the frequencies of various approaches and their relationships to manipulable variables such as textbooks and in-service teacher education. Another angle of study would focus on students, both individually and in social, ethnic, and economic groups: what difference do different kinds of conflictual pedagogy make to various students, and why?

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